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DE RUEHMK #0711 3491108
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 151108Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9105
INFO RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC

UNCLAS MANAMA 000711

SIPDIS
STATE FOR NEA AND EEB

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ECON](#) [ECIN](#) [ELAB](#) [BA](#)
SUBJECT: BAHRAIN PURSUES MOU WITH SBA TO PROVIDE SME ASSISTANCE

¶1. Summary: A U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) representative met with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) and Bahrain's Tamkeen labor fund to determine interest for SBA programming in Bahrain. During the visit, SBA and MOIC discussed recommended changes to a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding SBA assistance, and proposed a January 2010 timeline to finalize the agreement. End Summary.

¶2. SBA held preliminary meetings with MOIC officials in September on the margins of the Vital Voices Global Partnership Corporate Ambassadors Program. During that visit, an SBA delegation met with Kareem Al Rashid, Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Industrial Development at the MOIC, who expressed a desire to partner with SBA. As a result of that meeting, SBA drafted an MoU outlining details of the collaborative partnership, including each party's responsibilities and the program's focus areas.

¶3. On December 9, SBA contractor Charles Williams met with Kareem Al Rashid and Rajiv Patnagar, Advisor to the Minister, to discuss MOIC comments and proposed changes to the draft MoU. Williams communicated suggested edits to SBA representatives in Washington on December 10. Al Rashid expected the MoU to be approved and ready for signing after the quarterly Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) committee meeting in January. (The committee meeting will allow for the various SME development agencies in Bahrain to review and comment on the draft MoU.) Williams invited MOIC officials to the U.S. Presidential Entrepreneurship Summit that will take place in Washington D.C. March 1-2, 2010. He added that a formal signing ceremony could take place on the margins of that event, if the MoU were ready in time.

¶4. Williams met Tamkeen officials on December 10. Abdullellah Al-Qassimi, Chief Executive, and Dr. Ahmed Al-Shaikh, Vice President of Enterprise and Human Capital Development, requested that SBA facilitate the visit of a Tamkeen delegation to its headquarters in Washington D.C. in late January, 2010. Al-Qassimi said he would like his senior staff to learn first-hand about SBA operations and identify program opportunities to exploit SBA's technical expertise. Mohammed Bucheery, Senior Manager of Private Sector Support at Tamkeen, expressed particular interest in collaborating with SBA to develop SME export capacity and access to capital. Al-Qassimi invited Williams to review Tamkeen's new strategy and vision for SME development so that SBA could prepare a list of potential collaborative program opportunities.

¶5. Williams told econoff and MOIC officials that he plans to return to Bahrain in January, pending MOIC and Department approval of the draft MoU, to finalize the agreement with MOIC and prepare for Tamkeen's visit to the U.S.

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